

My week Philip Hammond*

Monday

Theresa May has called me into Number Ten to discuss this week's autumn statement. Nick and Fiona, her two advisers, are standing behind her shoulders. Nobody has offered me a cup of tea.

"There must be jam," says Nick. "Jam for the JAMS."

I can't stop looking at his beard. Could he even eat jam? It would be horrible.

"Exactly what do you mean," I ask, "by jam?"

Theresa sighs, and says jam means jam. Over her head, Fiona and Nick look at each other.

"Actually," says Fiona, "it doesn't."

"It means money," says Nick. "For the JAMS. Who are Just About Managing."

"Like Boris," says Theresa, confidently.

"It means," says Fiona, "the lower middle classes. Whom we need to offer some money."

"Hmmm," I say.

"What are you thinking?" says Theresa.

"I'm thinking we're in a jam," I say.

Tuesday

Quietly, I've arranged a meeting with the Three Brexiteers. I'm panicking, I tell them. I really need their help. This week could be horrible.

David Davis just smiles at me. That's all he does these days. With everybody. This really bright fixed smile. It's terrifying.

"I might," I say, "abolish the autumn statement itself. Just to give the papers something to write about."

Boris says I shouldn't stop there. Actually abolish autumn. Cut the deficit by a quarter at a stroke.

"But that's just mad," I say. "Isn't it?"

Davis beams.

Boris says I can surely abolish something, though. Something nobody likes.

"Such as Liam?" he suggests.

"Oi," says Liam.

"But that won't make any difference to anybody," I say, gloomily.

"Oi," says Liam.

Wednesday

Statement day. Fiona and Nick have called me in again. Just them this time. They say they're worried my autumn statement is going to be too gloomy and I need to find a more positive spin. Nick has his sleeves rolled up. Fiona is holding a really heavy paperweight. I think it might have blood on it.

"But there isn't one," I say, desperately. "We're missing all of our deficit reduction targets. Brexit alone is costing us almost £60 billion. That's almost

£1,000 for every person in the country."

Fiona says the pound has dropped, though.

"So?" I say.

"So it's less money than it used to be," explains Nick. "Which is great!"

Then Fiona says I should maybe announce our Sterling cost in dollars henceforth, so people think they're going down.

"Or euros," muses Nick.

"But probably dollars," says Fiona.

Thursday

Feedback was mixed. Some people are really cross because I used figures from the Office for Budget Responsibility which say Brexit might be awful. Iain Duncan Smith and Jacob Rees-Mogg have demanded a meeting. And I've brought Boris along, to see if he can lighten the mood. "OBR?" says Rees-Mogg. "You might as well ask the entrails of a fish!"

"They're only pessimistic because you told them to be," says IDS. "It's a disgrace." I sigh. Then I explain to

them that it's not just the OBR. It's also the IFS.

"But I thought he was IFS?" says Boris.

"IDS," says IDS.

"Is that not the Israelis?" says Boris. "No," says IDS.

Friday

Cabinet meeting. Theresa says it's been a good week. Although it did start badly with her speech at the CBI.

"Who he?" says Boris.

"Shut up," says Theresa.

Then she says it's important to focus on our successes. Because it would be too easy to get bogged down in the way we're now on course to our highest debt-to-GDP ratio since the 1960s. Or that Donald Trump won't talk to us unless we make Nigel Farage the US ambassador. Or that everybody in Europe hates us because of Boris's terrible jokes.

"Although the really important thing," she says, "is that we're still far more popular than the Labour Party!"

A small cheer goes around the room.

"Stop it!" I shout. "Stop pretending! Everything is awful! When will you people wake up?"

"You should be more like David," says Theresa, nodding at the Brexit secretary.

"Although when you look closely," says Liam, leaning in, "I think he might be crying."

*according to Hugo Rifkind



Tracker tells you how late the train is

Graeme Paton
Transport Correspondent

It is a regular source of frustration for railway passengers. You are standing on the platform watching in ignorance as the minutes tick by, with little idea of when, or if, your train will ever arrive.

Now railway bosses plan to haul Britain's Victorian network into the 21st century by using GPS technology to tell passengers exactly where their train is.

The technology, which is already widely used by bus operators and taxi services such as Uber, is expected to be installed on all trains by 2019 as part of a £4 million overhaul funded by the Department for Transport. The electronic information signs on board the trains will also be upgraded.

The development, led by the Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators, and Network Rail, comes amid anger over a rise in the number of delays. Official figures show that punctuality levels are worse than at any point in the past decade.

This has been blamed on a sharp increase in the number of trains to meet escalating demand, combined with the effects of extensive engineering work.

At present, a train's position can only be registered when it passes a signal or junction, leaving large parts of the network in the dark. Between London Victoria and Bromley trains pass 17 "timing points" but they only hit two between Darlington and Durham.

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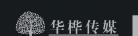
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